Sweet Dreams

I've come to a point in my life where I can't take the alarm clock seriously. Lying in my bed, rolled in blankets like an insect rolled in a hungry spider's web, I allow my mind to explore its own world before it's forced to accept the real one. The technical term for this is lucid dreaming. My dreams, however, are interrupted every ten minutes by the warning which I refuse to acknowledge. Eventually, I will give in to reality and its threats but only for the purpose of exhausting myself into a dream state later.

The funny thing is when I finally get up, it is a conscious decision that I make without the blaring scream of my oppressive alarm clock. I wonder if this is acceptance or submission at work.

As I attempt to get my feet under me, I notice how the electronic appliances help illuminate the room. All of them reminding me, giving me more reason to wake up, giving me the assurance that my livelihood is necessary, the assurance that they will still be here when I return.

After I get my feet under me, I enter the bathroom and brace myself for my first dose of reality for the day. The light switch turns up and immediately, my body struggles against it, squinting, hiding from its intensity. Stepping closer towards the light, I make my way to the tub. There's two dials to turn, but I only use one and turn it all the way.

I lean my bare body closer to the faucet spewing water and steam, my feet gradually warming the two tiles on which they stand. By the time I'm comfortable, the shower is ready. I take as long a shower as I can, letting every muscle warm up and loosen, yet I realize that they will all tense in under an hour.

Once I am dressed, my pace accelerates at an alarming rate. The alarm clock, though not blaring at the moment, is still declaring its ominous, infinite warning as I try to move more quickly to catch up. Every clock, the DVD player, the stereo, the computer, is an alarm clock now; all of them declaring the one constant we cannot control. I carefully arrange my briefcase, and then I quickly head for the door.

The brake lights come closer and closer until they illuminate my face. I push my fist into the steering wheel and curse under my breath as if I were afraid of the driver in front of me hearing. The traffic to my right passes me quickly as I attempt to merge into their lane. Once moving again, I glance down at the alarm clock in my car for a second and up again to see brake lights. This time there is nowhere to go, yet I and all the other drivers around me fill in any space in front of us to convince ourselves we're trying.

The slow speed of traffic is intense. Everybody is moving faster than their car is. Sooner than we'll all know, the traffic will clear, and we can move onward to the task of looking busier. Sooner than we'll all know, we won't have time to think anymore about being late or early or being.

Walking into work, bullets of people speed by me. I know by the time I hit that double door, I need to maintain the speed of everyone else. So the countdown begins.

Five.

I try to fearlessly maintain my comfortable pace though the bullets behind me become more and more daunting.

Four.

Three.

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Thinking of anything else I would rather do, thinking of how I started doing this in the first place, I begin to involuntarily quicken my steps.

Two.

Preparing myself for the numbing work ahead, I begin to not think at all.

One.

The doors swing open violently, and inside walks a man possessed. Walking with a sense of purpose but taking enough time to greet those who are worthy enough, he heads straight to his desk, carefully puts his briefcase on a low shelf in his cubicle and turns on the computer.

He takes a quick glance at his wristwatch and picks up a memo, a copy of a memo. His eyes quickly scan the words; they've been the same words for five years, yet every week he reads the new memo, the new copy of a memo.

The computer is now as fully active and possessed as the man, so he turns towards it and places his fingers on its keyboard. He opens a program, a copy of a program, and he once again furiously scans its data with his eyes. This is the possessed man's job; he is little more than a program, a copy of a program. His purpose is to check the actual program, the actual copy of a program, for errors that it was not programmed to foresee.

Everyday, there's a new program to be tweaked though every new program looks just as mundane as the one before it. A new method needed here, an unincorporated variable there, all copies of the same problems that the man had been receiving for five years. The progress of technology, the empowerment of modern society, the slavery of man to his own creation, is this the dream that man has come to realize?

Open, scan, delete, rebuild.

Open, scan, delete, rebuild.

Open, scan, delete, rebuild.

A short break to ensure more work in the afternoon.

Open, scan, delete, rebuild.

Open, scan, delete, rebuild.

Open, scan, delete, rebuild.

The possessed man takes a quick glance at his wristwatch; he could have left long ago. Had he not noticed anyone else leaving? Had anyone else left? *Just a few more programs* he tells himself. *Then I won't be as behind.* The truth is that he's been behind for five years. The truth is that he'll always be behind.

Finally, I pass through the doors to the other side. On the other side, the air is getting colder with the promise of night as I make my way to my vehicle. After I get in, I put my briefcase in the passenger seat; it pops open, and I hesitate for a moment and then close it.

In retreat from work, the traffic moves more gracefully. An occasional halt throws off the flow, but everyone seems more at ease and less in a hurry. The muscles on my back begin to soften; this feeling continues its way through my body. By the time I'm in the driveway, I'm practically floating out of my car.

Standing outside my white door, I already allow my mind to take course over reality. As I open the door, I see a light and step closer. I steadily follow the white sun around my room and through the soft, creamy ceiling.

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Floating higher and higher, I begin to see my car almost disappear. Swirls of blue and green dance with each other; the blue morphs into an orange and purple mixture. It is a moving painting so real that I can touch it. I hear the most beautiful voice accompanying the visual masterpiece, all of this gently persuading me to calm down and take it in. I look at the alarm clock on my wrist to find out time isn't working or perhaps doesn't exist.

Suddenly the white clouds open inward. Behind them a man lets go of their handle and hurries away. I just continue my flight until I find myself being lowered onto a park bench. I sit for a while and watch the ducks turn into swans turn into eagles.

"The ducks never stick around once I enter the scene." A young man sits on the bench next to me. "But I don't blame them either. I am a disturber of the peace. That is what I do; that is why I'm here. Which leads me to the question, why are you here?"

I try to think of how to respond, but I can't. I look at the young man, staring at me with those impatient eyes. I manage to mutter, "I don't know."

"That's okay; you don't have to tell the truth," he says, scratching the stubble on his chin. "You're only harming yourself, but whatever."

"Excuse me?"

"You're excused. Now, I know you won't appreciate this, especially at this place and time, but I'm gonna tell you the truth. I know who you are. I know you're a liar. You are not the man you portray yourself to be in front of your peers at work; you are not the free spirit you long to be in dreams much like this one."

The sun gradually turns red as the clouds pick up pace. Now and again, I can capture a bright flash of the red sun until another cloud quickly covers it. This repeats itself for quite some time, flashes of red occurring at unnaturally consistent intervals. The sun ahead will soon slip below the horizon.

"And all the while, in between your dreams and your work, you watch your life as if it were a bad TV rerun. Look, I know you have to work, and it's not the most uplifting job in the world. But neither are most people's jobs. You've experienced no more limitations than your average neighbor. So I ask you one more time, why are you here?"

"I don't know."

"When don't you lie!"

"All right! I'm here because I, because I hate my life. There's nothing that I've accomplished that I'm proud of and still nothing that I wish I could accomplish before I die. Is that what you want?"

Winds start to pick up, and the universe is moving faster. A bright light overhead, not the sun, begins to sear the scenery. Its radiant power overtakes my sight as everything becomes engulfed in a Godly white.

"This is a dream. You're here because you're a dreamer. I'm here because I'm a disturber of the peace, and my job here is not yet finished. I have some more questions, questions which you have already answered. What level of commitment are you willing to put into your life to make your dreams come to reality? Or will you be satisfied merely by dreaming? The decision you have made is *CLEAR!*"

A very powerful surge of wind jolts my body as a flash of lightning almost causes me to jump, almost. "*Come on, damn it!*" The man's words have taken a completely different voice and tone. The smooth and gentle melody is beginning to fade; the eagles

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turn into ravens turn into vultures. "*Breathe!* In with the mouth and out with the nose. Just calm down and feel the rhythm of your body, the vibrations of life. Now imagine your soul exiting your body. *We're losing him! CLEAR!*" Another thunderous crash of the universe, the universe falling down.

The beautiful universe vanishes in an instant. The surge of light is clicked off by the young man, now hiding his stubble under a surgeon mask. The red sun is no longer flashing amidst the clouds as it pulls out of the hospital. The white clouds are closed now. Behind them lie the orange translucent bottles, the giver of flight, emptied out completely and exploited, next to the open briefcase.

Around this briefcase rests a life in perfect order. Every stick of furniture, every appliance, every essence of this home contributes to an untold statement. Everything is as tidy and pleasing and lifeless as a man now dead, a man who had everything in life except a reason to live. And in the midst of all these accessories, these perfect distractions, these pyrite dreams, stood the life never lived, the road never taken, the universe fallen.

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